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INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
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RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 6686
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 0808
RUEHSA/AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG 9029
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 000581

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2019
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SF](#)
SUBJECT: SAG'S DALAI LAMA VISA REFUSAL SPARKS OUTCRY

PRETORIA 00000581 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR RAYMOND L. BROWN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

Summary

11. (U) The South African Government's (SAG) refusal to issue a visa for the Dalai Lama has caused outrage among the country's opposition parties, human rights NGOs, and some political leaders. The Dalai Lama was invited to appear at a peace conference on March 27 in Johannesburg hosted by South Africa's three surviving Nobel Peace Prize laureates, former presidents Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk, and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. The government, however, refused to grant a visa to the Dalai Lama, claiming that his visit was not official and his presence would draw attention away from South Africa and the 2010 World Cup and divert attention to Tibet and China. Minister of Health Barbara Hogan and other senior leaders in the country subsequently denounced the decision publicly and opposition parties across the political spectrum condemned the government's decision, with many describing the "shame" they felt at Pretoria's "unwillingness to promote basic human rights." It remains unclear how long the backlash will last. End Summary.

SAG Refuses Dalai Lama Visa

12. (U) The Dalai Lama was invited to appear at a peace conference on March 27 in Johannesburg hosted by South Africa's three surviving Nobel Peace Prize laureates, former presidents Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk, and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. The conference was to have discussed ways of using soccer to fight racism and xenophobia ahead of the World Cup. The government, however, refused to grant a visa to the Dalai Lama, claiming that his visit was not official and his presence would draw attention away from South Africa and the 2010 World Cup and divert attention to Tibet and China. Pretoria's decision to bar the Dalai Lama from attending sparked a fury of responses:

-- Both Tutu and de Klerk have subsequently withdrawn from participating in the conference, leading the organizers to postpone the conference.

-- Opposition parties across the political spectrum condemned the government's decision, with many describing the "shame" they felt at Pretoria's "unwillingness to promote basic human rights."

-- The University of Witswatersrand released a statement condemning the SAG's position and claimed the decision to deny entry was contrary to the constitutional principles of the new South Africa.

-- The Congress of the People (COPE) claimed the visa was refused because the Chinese Government is funding the African National Congress's (ANC) election campaign.

13. (U) Moreover, Minister of Health Barbara Hogan made forthright statements criticizing the SAG's decision to deny entry to the Dalai Lama. In response to a question from the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation during a press conference at the Constitutional Court on March 24, Hogan said the denial shows that the ANC-led SAG is "dismissive of people's human rights." She called on the SAG to apologize to South African citizens for this. She said, "Just the very fact that this government has refused entry to the Dalai Lama is an example of a government who is dismissive of human rights ... I believe (the SAG) needs to apologize to the citizens of this country, because it is in your name that this great man who has struggled for the rights of his country ... has been denied access." Hogan, who came to her office in September 2008 after the forced resignation of Mbeki, has ratcheted up this controversy in another way. Maseko in a press conference on March 25 said that Hogan's comments were "unfortunate." He noted that the decision was made by the SAG -- in which she is a Cabinet member -- and she was wrong to publicly criticize the government. This matter will "need attention in the near future," Maseko said. Asked about her remarks on March 25, Hogan declined comment. However, she received support from several prominent circles:

PRETORIA 00000581 002.2 OF 003

-- Constitutional Court justice Kate O'Regan publicly supported Hogan's comments on March 26, saying that the visa refusal was a "matter of dismay."

-- The Helen Suzman Foundation praised the principled stand that Hogan took against the government's decision.

-- The Arikanderbond "welcomed" Hogan's remarks and said that she showed that the government's interests are often too narrow.

14. (U) When asked why the government did not foresee the public relations disaster and international media backlash, Foreign Affairs spokesperson Ronnie Mamoepa said that the government does not make decisions to get good headlines. He noted, "We decide on what is in the best national interest." (Note: SAG spokespeople have avoided clarifying exactly which national interests would be harmed by the Dalai Lama's visit. End Note.) He also said that the intention of the peace conference "is to showcase our preparedness for 2010 and that soccer can bring peace. If the Dalai Lama were to come here it would divert attention from our readiness and everyone would focus on Tibet and China." In a media interview on March 23, the presidency's spokesman Thabo Masebe said the government believed the issue would "go away." As far as the SAG is concerned, this issue is in the past and they wish to "put it to bed," said government spokesperson Themba Maseko.

15. (C) Mamoepa described suggestions that South Africa bowed to pressure from China in denying the Dalai Lama a visa as "mischievous." South African media reported the Chinese Embassy Minister Counselor Dai Bing as saying his government had urged South Africa to prevent the Dalai Lama's visit or risk damaging bilateral relations. Masebe admitted that Chinese Embassy officials "raised concerns" about the Dalai Lama's visit with the SAG, but insisted that the decision to bar the Dalai Lama from coming into the country was based on South African interests. Local press reports have emphasized

the PRC Foreign Ministry statement of support for countries who deny the Dalai Lama travel access -- without specifically mentioning the SAG. Editorials make the further point that only two countries have refused the Dalai Lama a visa to enter -- the PRC and the SAG. Poloff met with University of Witwatersrand Chinese expert Garth Shelton on March 26. Shelton said that two months ago the Chinese Embassy started planning ways to prevent the Dalai Lama from visiting South Africa. The Chinese Embassy's strategy was two-fold. Chinese diplomats -- including Minister Counselor Bing -- met with government officials to discuss ways of barring the Dalai Lama. At the same time, Chinese Embassy First Secretary Mao Hong contacted Ebrahim Ebrahim to lobby against a visa. The Chinese Embassy's backup strategy if the SAG had gone forward with granting a visa was to warn of security problems to the host organizations for the Dalai Lama's visit. Also, three weeks ago Taiwanese officials told Shelton that the Chinese had made a substantial donation to the ANC for political campaigning. Shelton underscored the close ties between Beijing and the ANC by saying that Chinese Embassy officials attended Ebrahim's private birthday party.

¶6. (C) Despite the government's explanations, many see the visa refusal as Pretoria bowing to what is increasingly a large trading partner. Shelton predicted that there would be a closer relationship between China and South Africa under Zuma. Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in South Africa is calculated at over USD \$6 billion while South African FDI in China is around USD \$2 billion. On March 16, the South African Department of Trade and Industry and the China-Africa Development Fund (CADF) signed a memorandum of understanding on mining, energy, infrastructure, and information and communications technology. At the same time, the CADF opened its representative office in South Africa. (Note: The Chinese Development Bank is the sole shareholder in the CADF with an initial capital injection of USD \$1 billion that will eventually reach \$5 billion total capitalization for the continent. The CADF originated from President Hu Jintao's 2006 pledge at the China-Africa Cooperation summit to boost economic development in Africa. End Note.) Speaking at the ceremony, African National Congress Secretary-General Matthews Phosa said, "After the (South African national) election we will see an increase in cooperation between China and South Africa. The seeds have been sown." News reports speculate that China directly funds

PRETORIA 00000581 003.2 OF 003

ANC election coffers. The Financial Times in an article on March 24 pointed out that the Chinese are building a new Embassy in Pretoria, meant in part to signify the growing ties between the two countries. On March 24, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Qin Gang, said at a media briefing, "All countries should respect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity ... and oppose Tibetan independence. We appreciate relevant countries' measures." He did not, as mentioned above, make specific mention of South Africa. (Note: Shelton in his meeting with Poloff downplayed trade between the two countries as a factor in the SAG's decision to refuse a visa. End Note.)

¶7. (U) The Dalai Lama has visited South Africa twice. He took part in the World Parliament of Religions in 1999 at which time he was scheduled to meet former President Thabo Mbeki. The Chinese government protested when Mbeki agreed to meet the Dalai Lama separately and Mbeki canceled the meeting. The Dalai Lama visited South Africa again in 2004 as a guest of the African Cultural Heritage Trust.

Comment

¶8. (U) It is unclear for how long the backlash to the decision will last. Political leaders and opposition parties

may use future 2010 World Cup events to make a statement against the refusal to allow entry. However, the fervor may just as easily die down as the country increasingly focuses on the election next month. Hogan's statements and the government's response has led to speculation that her tenure as Minister of Health may be at risk. More imminent is the curiosity about whether her plan to lead a SAG delegation to Beijing in two weeks will actually happen. Moreover, while any public censure of Hogan would be met with dismay by media and civil society leaders who applaud her candor and managerial effectiveness, the ANC may well punish the breach of solidarity even at the cost of criticism.

LA LIME